

The English Leaflet

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THE MARCH MEETING

PLANS for the annual meeting of the Association, to be held in the Lecture Hall of the Boston Public Library at 10 o'clock on Saturday the eighth of March, embrace a varied program: a retrospective view of the high-school course in English, a discussion of current problems, and some inspirational leaven for the future. *THE HIGH-SCHOOL COURSE IN ENGLISH*, the topic for the morning session, will be discussed from two points of view, that of the recent graduate and that of the administrator. In order that we may learn from former students the values they found or failed to find in the English courses to which they were subjected, the Committee has prepared a questionnaire touching both the content and the presentation of the course, and submitted it to two thousand high-school graduates now in colleges, technical schools, and business establishments. The return from these three groups will be compiled and presented by one representative from each group. The preliminary questionnaire, tried out at Harvard, revealed some interesting facts. The results of the revised questionnaire will doubtless be even more illuminating. We are anticipating that the material presented will be such as to stir the audience to join in the discussion led by Miss Edna O. Spinney of Lynn. For the second part of this program, John F. Scully, Superintendent of Schools in Brockton, Massachusetts, will give us, from his experience as an administrator, his conclusions regarding the requisites of good English teaching. Of course the business of the Association—reports and the election of officers—will be disposed of at the morning session.

In accordance with our usual custom at the spring meeting, the Association will adjourn at one o'clock for luncheon at the Hotel Brunswick. Two speakers of note have graciously consented to address us, in not too pedagogical terms. Dr. Karl Young of Yale University will make his first appearance among us, taking as his topic *SHAKESPEARE IN THE SCHOOLS. CURRENT BOOKS AND AUTHORS* is the subject chosen by John Farrar, Editor of *The Bookman*.

With such speakers and such a varied program, it is the hope of the Executive Committee that all the members may find enough of interest to lure them to Boston on March eighth.

Sally Freeman Dawes, President.

CO-OPERATION WITH OTHER DEPARTMENTS

AGNES M. FOLLEN

Breed Junior High School, Lynn, Mass.

I

The major part of the nine hundred odd pupils of the seventh, eighth, and ninth grades of the Breed Junior High School are foreign born or the children of foreign born parents. About fifty per cent is Polish; ten per cent, Greek and Armenian; twenty per cent Russian; the remainder, Italian, Canadian, English, Swedish, and native American. Many of these children do not hear one word of English spoken in their homes, and their knowledge of English is obtained from the street, the playground, the cheap motion picture, the low-priced magazine, and the school. In the afternoons, the Hebrew boys attend a special school in which the language of their people is taught. The Polish and Greek children are encouraged to use the language of their parents in their homes and in their churches.

In a school composed of so many different racial groups with each group, perhaps unconsciously, having an influence that is not conducive to the use of English, the teaching of this most important subject became a complicated problem. The ill effects of the failure to comprehend the meaning of the simplest printed page have many times been felt in every department of school work. "If Koloskey had a better understanding of English, he could do better work in French." "If Cashiot's had any kind of an English vocabulary, he might pass in history." The foregoing statements were made in a general teachers' meeting, and to a certain extent, the statements were true. The teachers of French and history, however, did not intend to cast any reflection on the work of the English department, but the teacher of English did not consider the constant reference to poor English in the light of a compliment. Moreover, she had her grievance, too. She thought the other departments, in their effort to secure good work in their individual subjects were oftentimes negligent in supporting the work of the English department, for outside of the English classrooms,

little attention had been paid to choice of words, correct grammatical forms, and complete statements.

Early in October at the request of the English teachers, the principal of the school called a conference of the heads of the various departments. The purpose of the conference was to devise ways and means of wrestling with the problem of English. After careful consideration, it was generally agreed that the work in all departments suffered from the pupils' limited knowledge of English, but that the situation might be improved if all departments, through strong team work, would stress the importance of this subject in every school activity. The heads of the history, mathematics, music, and French departments expressed a willingness to experiment with a proposed plan by means of which it was hoped more satisfactory results in all subjects might be obtained by emphasizing the use of good English. Having secured the co-operation of the principal and the heads of departments, it was not a very difficult matter to interest the assistants, though in a few cases the interest bordered on tolerance. The principal volunteered to announce and boost a "Drive for Good English" at all assemblies the following week.

II

According to the proposed plan the "Drive" would continue during the next quarter or eight-week period. It was agreed that each department should feel at liberty to enlist the services of the English department in solving its special problems, and should furnish, to a limited extent, practical material for oral and written composition for class-work in English. In no department should the English work be emphasized at the expense of other subjects; it should be used as a weapon to simplify and clarify the meaning of other subjects.

The following general rules of procedure were outlined for the "Drive."

1. All teachers shall commend any oral or written work that is clearly and concisely expressed in good English.

2. All papers shall be marked with a fraction; the numerator shall indicate the mark for the subject matter,

and the denominator shall indicate the work in English. Any paper having a denominator of A shall be sent to the teacher of English for special credit in English.

3. All written work in every subject, except mathematics, shall be written in ink on uniform paper.

4. The same form of heading shall be used by all pupils in the seventh, eighth, and ninth grades.

5. An English teacher shall be present at all club meetings for the purpose of constructive criticism.

6. One pupil in each division shall serve as a censor for one day to take note of errors in English and names of pupils making errors. The list of errors and names shall be sent to the English teacher at the close of each day.

7. The French, history, and mathematics departments shall give about ten lines of dictation in French, history, or mathematics once in two weeks. The dictation in mathematics may be an assignment of a lesson, as problems in arithmetic or algebra. The dictation in French may be the translation of a paragraph in English into French. The dictation in history may be a summary of a chapter to be amplified. When the dictation papers have served this purpose in the several classrooms, they shall be sent to the English teacher.

8. Good voice control, rounding tones, and distinct articulation shall be commended. Slovenly speech shall not be tolerated.

III

The week following the conference, the principal announced in all assemblies that during the next quarter a "Drive for Good English" would be conducted. He emphasized the fact that all departments would help to make the "Drive" a success, and that any particularly good application of English work in connection with other subjects would mean a "bonus." The idea of a "bonus" was the cause of some enthusiasm among even the rather indifferent pupils, probably because they had never been given a bonus before.

According to agreement, the French department gave four

dictation exercises during the quarter. The four exercises consisted of paragraphs and short conversations dictated in English to be translated and re-written in French. The pupils were instructed that the paper, when the translation had been made, was to be returned to the teacher for a mark in English. Spelling, punctuating, and capitalization were to be considered in marking. Only the first draft would be accepted.

The first dictation, a short conversation, was given to 106 ninth-grade pupils. Of these, 57 wrote correct papers. The last dictation, equally difficult, was given to 108 ninth-grade pupils, and 74 had correct papers. The difference was not produced by the work of any one teacher but by the team work of all teachers. Correct spelling, correct punctuation, and neatly written papers were demanded in all subjects so that the matter became a habit. Teachers found that they received about what they demanded and no more.

A fair English translation in verse of the French poem, "Noel," by Théophile Gautier was submitted by one ninth-grade pupil in place of a theme. The pupil received a mark for the translation from the French teacher and a mark for the English verse from the English teacher.

Each grade in the school has an assembly period once a week under the direction of the music teacher. The program usually consists of the reading of school notices, singing, victrola selections, and a special number, such as a dumb-bell drill or a folk dance. During the "Drive" the music teacher, co-operating with the English teacher, arranged the following program for the seventh grade:

1. Oral composition, The Origin of Our National Song
2. Singing by the grade, Star Spangled Banner
3. Sketch of Julia Ward Howe.
4. Singing by the grade, Battle Hymn of the Republic
5. Reading of theme, Sherman's March to the Sea
6. Singing by the grade, Marching Through Georgia
7. Original story, Life on a Cotton Plantation
8. Singing by the grade, Southern Melodies

The stories and sketches were regular English lessons prepared at the suggestion of the music teacher. For the

ninth-grade assembly a Wagner Program was prepared in a similar way. All pupils prepared oral and written themes on the German legends. As a reward, three of the themes were given in Assembly. An idea of the music was obtained from the victrola selections.

IV

As a part of the work in the eighth-grade English, pupils had been expected to collect poems which appeared from time to time in newspapers and magazines. Each pupil had been requested to collect only the poems which made a personal appeal to him or to her and to write the reason for the appeal. Some of the poems were copied in ink during the penmanship period, some were cut from a paper or magazine and mounted on drawing paper the same size as the writing paper. In cases where the poems were written during the penmanship period, the work was considered a penmanship lesson. When each pupil had collected about ten poems the selections were enclosed in a loose folder or cover. The covers, with appropriate decorations, were made during the drawing period under the direction of the art teacher. Some pupils made additional sheets which illustrated certain selected poems.

Posters for a lecture with motion pictures of "Wild Animals in Their Native Haunts" were prepared through the co-operation of the drawing and the English departments for the purpose of advertising the lecture. The printed matter was written and arranged by the English department and the drawings by the art department.

During Education Week a great effort was made to induce the parents to visit the schools in order to become better acquainted with the public school system and the methods employed in present-day teaching. Since it was difficult for the fathers to visit the schools during the day, a special session was held in the evening from seven to nine o'clock. Every parent received a written invitation to visit the school during Education Week. The written invitations were prepared as English class work and copied during the penmanship period. During the week the teachers were surprised to find the parents very much interested in the "Drive for

Good English." Many spoke English with difficulty and did not hesitate to express their realization of the handicap it had proved to be in their social and business dealings. It was very evident that the "Drive for Good English" had far reaching effects.

The co-operation of the physical training department was finally enlisted in the cause of better English. It had been customary for the heads of the physical training department to write all notices and reports, pertaining to school athletics, for the local papers. The principal suggested that during the "Drive" all sport news should be written by some member of the "team," submitted to the English teacher for correction, and returned to the coach for verification of facts. In addition to this concession by the department, four ninth-grade boys were allowed to address the seventh-grade boys on "The Value of Physical Training." One spoke on the value of baseball, one on football, one on basketball, and one on track athletics. The boys substituted the talk for a written theme in English and seemed to enjoy the novelty of addressing a lower grade.

V

About Thanksgiving time, the seventh-grade history classes had finished the work on the Colonial Period. A committee of six was appointed to collect material, pictures, and facts pertaining to the first Thanksgiving Day. One member of the committee was to tell the story, making use of material collected by the committee. When the story had been told, every pupil in the group was given an opportunity to write a dialogue that might have taken place between two boys who lived in Plymouth when the first Thanksgiving was celebrated. The dialogue was to illustrate the story told by the member of the committee of six. The papers were corrected by the history teacher from a history standpoint. The ten papers of highest grade were turned over to the English department, and the paper receiving the highest average was dramatized for the seventh-grade assembly. The writer of the dialogue was considered in the same position as a winner of a contest. The history and the English teachers

agreed upon a list of poems that should be studied in each grade for combined history and English work.

In connection with the ninth-grade work in vocational training, a local newspaper office was visited. The reports made by the pupils were marked by the vocational-training teachers for subject matter and by the English teacher for English.

Usually the daily mathematics lesson had been written in pencil, but as arranged at the conference, a dictation lesson that was in every sense a mathematics lesson was given four times during the "Drive." This dictation was written in ink on regular composition paper. Instead of writing five algebra problems on the board, the problems were dictated. At the close of the lesson, the dictation papers were turned over to the English teacher. It did not take very long for the pupils to discover and appreciate the value and necessity of punctuation in problem work. The dictation proved to be as good for mathematics as for English.

Another experiment tried by the mathematics teacher was the paraphrasing of a problem. A rather long problem in eighth-grade arithmetic or ninth-grade algebra was assigned. Before solving the problem, each pupil was required to word the problem in another way, showing his idea of the given conditions and consequent results.

In all grades pupils have been required to bring into the classroom original problems pertaining to their school or their home. This year many of the problems have pertained to buildings and building material, probably, because of the nearness of a sixteen-room addition in process of construction. Through the problems presented, the vocabulary of the seventh- and the eighth-grade pupils has been greatly enlarged.

VI

Contrary to expectation, the various school clubs were found ready and willing to contribute their share of assistance to the "Drive." The club advisers and English teachers were fortunate in securing the interest of the club leaders. The reports of the club secretaries were carefully prepared before being read, and the officers made a special effort to

present all subject matter in as clear and concise a manner as possible. The club members reflected the attitude of their leaders, with the result that the business affairs were never so well conducted and the use of good English never so much appreciated. Some combination club meetings were held; one, that was particularly interesting, being the English and mathematics club meeting. The program was prepared by a joint committee of the two clubs. It consisted of reviews of some of Joseph Lincoln's books by the English club members and a dramatized story, showing the use and value of the slide rule, by three boys of the mathematics club. The value of the slide rule was taught in a clever, interesting, and enjoyable manner by utilizing the dramatic instinct. The value of developing this instinct was very forcibly presented to the minds of the teachers present. At the request of the clubs, the three boys received a "bonus" for the writing and presentation of the dialogue.

The book reviews aroused considerable interest among the club members, and the librarian reported an increased demand for the books and poems of Joseph Lincoln.

The general communications issued by the secretaries of the various clubs as notices for newspapers, letters to other clubs, to stores, to book publishers, to teachers in the school, and to teachers in other schools were passed upon by the English censor in each division, and, in cases of disagreement, submitted to the English teacher for settlement. On the whole, the work in the school clubs seemed to prove the most valuable, because from it the pupils seemed to gain an appreciation of the practical value of good English in everyday affairs.

Ordinarily, if pupils fail to take an interest in their English work, something is fundamentally wrong. The remedy, however, lies not in making the work easier but in somehow transforming it so that the pupil, in his own mind, will feel it in his recreation as well as in his work.

It is true that if the English work is applied diplomatically to the work in other subjects, the idea that the use of good English is a task becomes somewhat modified, while the idea that the use of good English as a medium of ways and means becomes significant. Consequently, the English

teacher should try to secure the application of the work in English to all pupil activities. Without co-operation it is difficult to accomplish this, but after an eight-weeks' trial, the teachers of other subjects were forced to acknowledge that insistence on the use of good oral and written English in a subject had a tendency to improve the work in that particular subject, because concise, accurate phrasing was usually the result of correct conceptions and clear thinking.

As soon as a pupil discovers a helpful application of English, his discovery leads to an increased respect for the subject. It is no longer a thing apart but something which he can control to aid him in securing his objective in his club work, social life, or his business affairs. Of course, this viewpoint may be brought about through constructive comparison of newspapers and magazines and through the writing of letters and advertisements in the regular English classes, but nothing is more valuable for proving to the pupil the need of good English in everyday life than the application of the principles of good English to his daily work in all school activities.

As a rule, the seventh-grade pupil fails to see much connection between English and history, but when he has obtained a good mark in history by writing a simple one-act drama for an English lesson, and the written drama is enacted for pleasure because it is correct English as well as correct history, the two subjects show a closer relationship, proving to the child mind, the value of one subject to the other.

VII

Interest in nearly any form of school work is sometimes actuated by a desire on the part of a student to make a good impression upon his fellow students. This desire is a very natural and human one. The average man or woman is interested in one or more social, business, or religious organizations, and through the desire of making a good impression, or one closely related to it, has discovered the need of good English in everyday life. So the student, through his school activities, should be led to discover for himself the value of everyday application of this powerful weapon.

All the teachers of our school have expressed themselves in favor of a forty-weeks' "Drive" instead of an eight weeks' "Drive." The results indicate that in the future more careful attention will be given to oral and written expression by teachers and pupils; that an interest has been aroused in the subject of voice control; that as a result of improved team work a more cordial relationship will exist among the teachers; that both teachers and pupils have a greater realization of the practical utility and application of the work of the English department.

While the scheme of co-operation has not been a particularly systematic one, it is hoped that the experiment will lead to something that will be of inestimable value to these children who, on account of their numbers, if for no other reason, will in a few years largely determine the policies of this city.

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